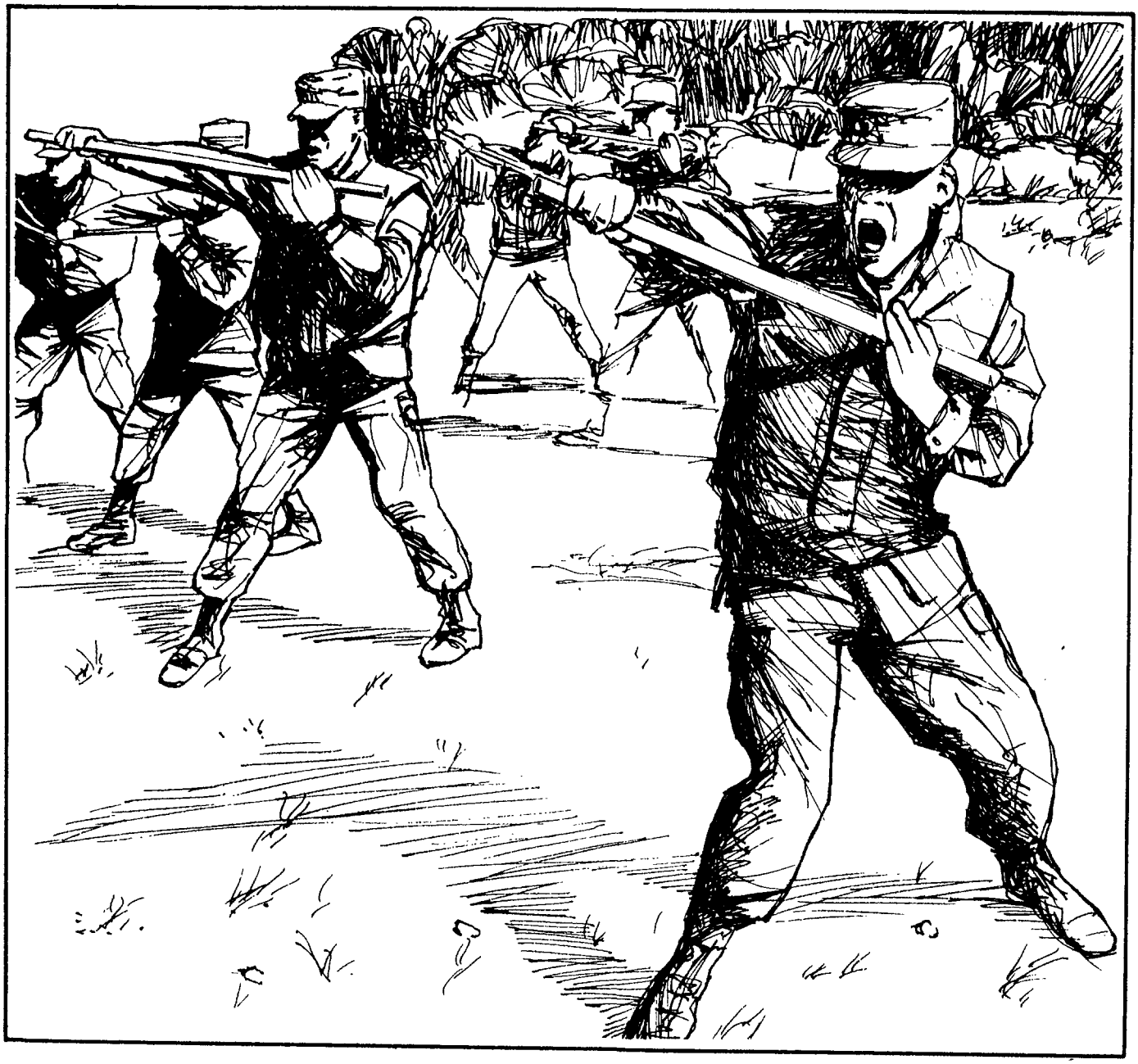

CONTINGENCY TRAINING
FOR STABILITY AND SUPPORT OPERATIONS

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Since the end of the Cold War, debate has raged about whether the tasks of operations other than war should be part of the mission essential task lists (METLs) for U.S. Army units. While this article will not attempt to address that larger question, it will discuss the way one infantry battalion performed the mission of moving more than 3,000 Cubans from the Republic of Panama to the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo, Cuba, and raise points for consideration in the METL debate. This 1995 mission is still a valuable source of lessons on ways a combat unit can perform a noncombat mission in a high-visibility, politically sensitive environment.

The chain of events that led to the mission began with the exodus of Cuban migrants in 1994. The U.S. Government

decided to regard these Cubans as economic migrants instead of political refugees. Those picked up by the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard were sent to holding camps in the Republic of Panama, where U.S. officials began processing their applications for entry to the United States. This solution was effective but relatively short-lived. The Panamanians soon tired of the situation and demanded that the Cubans be relocated. Washington then decided to move them to Guantanamo.

In December 1994, frustration and boredom in the camps themselves had led to large-scale riots in which approximately 200 U.S. soldiers were injured by thrown rocks and other missiles. These riots and the videotaped actions of the Cuban migrants were to have profound effects on the training and the attitudes of the force sent to move them.

When the call came, the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, was on what the division terms Black (alert) cycle. Only two battalions were needed for the mission, and the two at the highest alert levels were the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 502d Infantry. This article will focus on the actions of the 1st Battalion.

When the unit was alerted, the company commanders were called to the battalion headquarters, where they received briefings on the situation in Panama and watched a video of the 1994 riots. The deployment date was set for two and one-half weeks after notification. This gave the battalion time to train its soldiers for a mission not included in its METL.

In-country training also included lessons taught to the entire task force on important cultural differences between the United States. and Cuba.

The battalion put the time to good use. The training its soldiers underwent at Fort Campbell consisted of three basic components: human rights and rules of engagement, riot control training, and individual control holds and techniques.

Because the soldiers of the battalion would be dealing with large numbers of civilians in a politically charged, high-visibility environment, they received detailed classes on the rules of engagement. These rules clearly defined situations in which the use of force was and was not permitted, along with basic human rights training in regard to maintaining the dignity of the Cubans. All members of the battalion had to take a test on this instruction; those who did not pass it were retrained and retested.

For the second part of the pre-deployment training, the battalion was issued face shields and riot batons and shields. Using Field Manual (FM) 19-15, *Civil Disturbances*, as a guide, the battalion S-3 developed a training plan for dealing with large-scale riots. The soldiers practiced baton techniques and riot control formations.

This training culminated in an exercise in which more than 100 soldiers of the division's air defense artillery battalion played the role of rioters inside an enclosure. Each company, wearing riot gear, first had to prevent the rioters from forcing their way through the front gate. Then they had to enter the compound in formation to perform a variety of tasks such as removing wounded detainees, seizing riot instigators, and breaking up fights. The attitude of the role-players inside the enclosure ranged from passive to violently resistant. Some of the soldiers acting as detainees carried red marking pens to simulate knives and other homemade weapons. The marks these left served as graphic evidence of the effectiveness of the riot control training and unit teamwork in a riot situation.

In the most violent of these scenarios, the detainees attempted to separate individual soldiers from the formation and "kill" them with the red markers. In these confrontations, the role players had a slight advantage that they would not have in a real situation: They could try to snatch soldiers from the formation without fear that the others in the formation would actually injure them with riot batons. Despite this departure from reality, or even because of it, the soldiers involved learned several important lessons.

One of these lessons was the importance of maintaining physical contact between adjacent members in a formation. This is key to maintaining the integrity of the formation when surrounded by a violent mob. Soldiers often fixate on the situation to their immediate front and fail to realize that the formation has started to move. This momentary inattention can cause a gap when one section begins moving while one or more soldiers remain stationary. This is extremely important because of the difficulty of passing verbal commands amid the noise of a riot. Physical contact, or at least close proximity between soldiers, reduced the chance of a break in contact between the soldiers on the line.

In the more violent scenarios, the soldiers also learned that the only way to prevent the mob from dragging individual soldiers away from the formation was to respond immediately and aggressively to any attempts to lay hands on them. Once a unit has been surrounded by a mob intent on causing injury or death, there must be no hesitancy about the use of the baton against the rioters. Any reluctance to vigorously defend the formation and its members may result in tragedy. Once a soldier has been pulled from the formation, his chances of safe return are minimal; the crowd will always be able to drag him away from the formation faster than the formation can move toward the crowd and still maintain its cohesion.

One of the scenarios in this training required the company to enter a compound of rioters and try to seize the leaders. Three-man "snatch teams" moved about inside the formation. Whenever a mob leader was spotted near the formation, the team members would move to the side closest to their target. On the word from the team leader, the snatch team would rush outside the formation, take hold of their target, and drag him back inside the formation where he could be subdued and flex-cuffed.

This proved much more difficult in practice than in theory. The leaders who realized they were targets would always keep a row or two of people between them and the formation. Besides, they could always move away from the formation more quickly than the formation could pursue them. Any snatch team members who left the safety of the

formation also risked being captured by the mob.

Initially, the members of the task force removed their load carrying vests (LCVs) before entering the enclosure to prevent the rioters from grabbing them. The soldiers of the battalion soon learned, however, that there was little danger of being grabbed by their vests from the front, protected as they were by riot shields and batons. But when the rioters did manage to seize a soldier, the absence of an LCV left the other members of the formation with little to grab in pulling him back. By wearing their LCVs into the compound, therefore, the battalion's soldiers did not appreciably increase their chances of being pulled out of the formation by the rioters, but did give the others in the formation something to hold onto in pulling them back to safety.

These training scenarios also demonstrated the importance of having a simple but well-thought-out plan that had been briefed down to the lowest levels in the company and rehearsed beforehand as much as time allowed. Although the manual contains a detailed set of commands for riot control, verbal orders quickly become useless in the midst of a howling mob. One method the battalion used in an attempt to overcome this problem was a small bullhorn, but this was only a little better than the unaided voice; in the crowded center of the formation it just got in the way. This attempt also demonstrated that *hearing* the command was only half of the problem; the other half was being able to muster the necessary concentration to isolate the commander's orders from the crowd noises. This difficulty in communication also lends importance to maintaining the cohesion of the formation, since the loss of a soldier to the mob naturally necessitates a change in movement and action that must be ordered verbally.

This training provided valuable experience for the soldiers, but it also showed some weaknesses in the doctrine for riot control as laid out in FM 19-15. An outnumbered unit facing a hostile mob required more than just shields and riot batons to accomplish many of the missions assigned to them. The officers and men of the task force spent much time before and during the deployment discussing tactics and techniques for dealing with these situations. These questions led to the development of additional methods for riot control after arriving in Panama.

Further training and instruction came from the military police at Fort Campbell. Instructors from the division's MPs taught various types of control holds to subdue violent or resisting migrants. They also taught methods of physically transporting persons against their will. All of this training emphasized dealing with those who violently resisted, demonstrating the effect the video tape of the December riots had on the thinking of the task force's leaders.

All of this training was documented down to individual level. Each company maintained a checklist for each soldier, squad, and platoon, verifying that these soldiers had demonstrated proficiency in riot control techniques, formations, and human rights training. At first glance, this may appear to be merely an attempt to protect the command in the event of an ugly incident, but it went far beyond that. The battalion's leaders realized the potential for a public relations disaster for the task force, the Army, and the U.S. Government. In the event of a violent incident, the training would help soldiers deal humanely and effectively with the problem, while this documentation would serve as proof of the training and the care taken in preparing the battalion's soldiers for their mission.

After two and one-half weeks of training, the battalion deployed to the Republic of Panama. The advance party, which had deployed three days earlier, consisted of the battalion and company executive officers, the battalion S-4, and other support personnel. This advance party began setting up the area that would be home for the task force—a large open field on Howard Air Force Base.

On the high ground above the area, which was soon filled with large tents, was a small cinder-block latrine and shower house. Below the tent ground were two mess tents and eating areas. (The troops were to receive a hot breakfast and dinner and MREs—meals, ready to eat— for lunch.)

The first order of business upon arriving in Panama was acclimatization. Making the transition from the January cold of Fort Campbell to the tropical heat of Panama took some time. Leaders at all levels took special care to see that the troops did not overexert themselves during physical training or mission training until they had had several days to adjust to the heat and humidity. All soldiers of the task force were required to carry their filled two-quart canteens with them at all times, and hydration was enforced for the first few weeks of the mission.

After about two days for acclimatization, the riot control training began again in earnest. By this time, the task force had developed a plan for moving the Cubans, and the companies were able to develop a more mission-specific training plan:

Company B had the mission of moving the migrants from the camp onto the buses, and of preparing for possible riots and escape attempts at the camp.

Company A was assigned to escort the Cubans on the buses between the camps where they were being held and the airport. The company's training focused on disturbances on the buses en route.

Company C would move the migrants from the buses and put them on the planes that would take them to Guantanamo. The company's training focused on removing uncooperative or resistant migrants from the buses and putting them on the planes and on preventing the escape of migrants from the plane. For all of this training, soldiers from the battalion's headquarters company played the role of Cuban migrants. They took this duty seriously, and their willingness to endure the less-than-gentle treatment from their fellow soldiers contributed to the eventual success of the mission.

The knowledge that the international press and various human rights organizations would be observing this operation affected all facets of the training. Everyone realized that no matter how well the operation went it would be meaningless if any U.S. soldier was seen mistreating a migrant or using unnecessary force. For this reason, the training of all companies emphasized taking control of a situation and ending it quickly with a minimum of visible force. This

meant that more force used less visibly was preferable to a situation in which an attempt to minimize the use of force could result in a long drawn-out struggle or confrontation.

To this end, the task force soldiers made extensive use of the control holds, joint-locks, and other techniques learned from the MPs at Fort Campbell. For example, in the event of a migrant who resisted being transferred, it was considered better to move him quickly using a choke hold than to have a long battle trying to carry him while he struggled to resist. To develop these skills and build confidence, at least one company held wrestling matches and conducted aggressiveness training with the riot gear so the migrants would not intimidate the soldiers, especially the younger ones. This training consisted of something resembling football blocking drills: Soldiers would slam up against riot shields and strike them with batons so that other soldiers holding them would learn to be confident in the protection of their equipment; this would give them the reassurance they needed to put an end to any resistance or violence on the part of the Cubans.

Experience in this mission training also led to changes in the equipment used by the bus teams from Company A. When the riot batons with which the battalion had been practicing proved to be too long to wield effectively in the confines of the buses, the company cut several of them down to about half their original length, producing short truncheons. These, along with the shotguns carried on the buses, were not openly displayed until needed.

In addition to the mission essential tasks, the companies also continued practicing riot control training just in case conflict in the camps flared up again. Besides the formations and tactics practiced at home station, the companies invented new methods based on what they had seen in the videotaped riots. In the videos it was clear that the rioters had not tried to stand against any serious attempt to move toward them by troops equipped with riot gear. They preferred to retreat when challenged; and, unlike the opposing force at Fort Campbell, they stayed some distance from the riot control troops. The rioters were always able to move back from the riot control units more quickly than the riot control forces could use the "stomp and drag" technique described in FM 19-15. The injuries they inflicted in the December riots were mostly from stones they threw.

To combat this tactic, one technique was to bring the company on line, begin advancing at a walk, and then give the order to charge. At the order, the line would move forward at a dead sprint. Any rioter caught by the advancing line would be grabbed and forced to the ground as the line swept over him. A squad of soldiers running behind the main line would seize and flex-cuff those who had been caught by the main line.

In-country training also included lessons taught to the entire task force on important cultural differences between U.S. and Cuba. The soldiers learned, for example, about the Cubans extreme sensitivity to what they considered matters of personal honor and dignity, including the treatment of their families and wives or friends. Legal and human rights training given in Panama covered much of the same ground as that at Fort Campbell, but it was more detailed and provided a specific set of steps to be followed, time and situation permitting, for the escalation of force.

The basic plan was simple. Each day five convoys of five buses each would transport the migrants from the camps on the Empire Range complex down to Howard AFB, where they would be loaded onto the airplanes that would lift them back to Cuba. Company B would see to it that the migrants boarded the buses at the camps, forming two lines from the gate to the bus, between which the Cubans would pass. Company B also had the contingency mission of providing a platoon size quick-reaction force to air assault anywhere along the route in the event of an incident or escape.

Company A, with the battalion scout and mortar sections attached, served as escorts on the buses. (The bus drivers were soldiers from the task force.) Behind each convoy was a HMMWV (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle) carrying a squad fully equipped with riot gear to serve as an immediate reaction force.

At Howard AFB, Company C moved the migrants to the planes; one platoon formed two lines from the door of the bus to the rear ramp of the airplane. A second platoon was dispersed behind them to stop or chase any migrant who might break through the first line. Out of sight were several stretchers that could be used to transport any migrant who resisted passively, refusing to move.

In-country training also included lessons taught to the entire task force on important cultural differences between the U.S. and Cuba.

Positioned near the rear ramp of the plane, a soldier with a video camera recorded the movement of each migrant from the bus to the plane. In the event of violence, the battalion would have its own footage to show that U.S. soldiers had acted properly.

At the entrance to the airfield, where the convoy waited as the buses moved to the plane one at a time to unload, another platoon stood watch in case of problems on the waiting buses. This platoon also served as the company quick-reaction force. It had a dedicated 2½-ton truck that remained at the platoon position with its riot gear and loaded shotguns on board. Upon receiving the proper code word from the company commander, the platoon would immediately load the truck and move to the loading site to help restore order.

The route between the camps and the airport was patrolled and secured by the battalion's Company D. This company would serve both as a reaction force in the event of an incident on one of the buses and as a security element against anyone protesting the move. At Howard, Air Force security police (SPs) were responsible for maintaining control of the migrants once they were put on the planes. Other SP units secured the airfield, and several on horseback patrolled the edge of the field in the event a migrant escaped from the soldiers of Company C.

For all of the soldiers involved, except for the reaction force following the convoys, the uniform was BDUs with soft caps and no LCVs. The purpose was to reduce the confrontational appearance of the operation. Because of the fears of the AIDS virus, known to be present in the camps,

the soldiers were issued surgical gloves but were not allowed to wear them because of concerns about appearances. The gloves, along with the regular black leather gloves, were kept in cargo pockets in the event they were needed. It was, of course, an imperfect solution. If these gloves were needed, there would be no time to put them on. Each soldier in the task force carried a can of police-strength pepper spray. And certain individuals, especially on the bus teams, carried electric stun guns.

Several days before the operation, the task force held a full-scale rehearsal. Watching this dry run were members of several non-governmental organizations, many of whom intellectually and emotionally disliked the military and disagreed with the repatriation of the migrants to Cuba. Although these people were not converted by what they saw, neither did they see anything they could use against the U.S. forces.

For the execution of the mission, the responsibility for the different camps was divided between the two battalions of the task force. There was some mixing of work on certain days (companies from one battalion moving the migrants and a company from the other battalion loading them on the planes), but as a general rule the battalions worked as units.

After all the preparation for the worst-case scenario, the mission went smoothly. The migrants were nervous but nonviolent. Given this lack of violent response, and to soften the public image of the movement, the riot batons the soldiers carried were removed and stored nearby.

All along the route, but especially at Howard AFB, large numbers of reporters were gathered to watch the transfer, but those hoping to record violent incidents and confrontations were disappointed.

Working at Howard AFB, Company C did a large amount of direct coordination with Air Force SPs—both those stationed at Howard who carried out the airfield security mission, and the composite squadron that had come to serve as escorts and guards on the flights to Cuba. These coordinations went smoothly because they were made at the lowest possible level instead of through several levels of staff. The main coordination was to determine at what point the Air Force would become responsible for the migrants. For this mission, the two sides agreed that the migrants would be the responsibility of the Air Force as soon as they crossed the threshold of the rear ramp of the transport plane.

One thing that delayed the joint training of the Army and Air Force teams that manned the airfield was the organization of the Air Force squadron. Instead of sending an organic unit to perform the mission, the Air Force formed a composite squadron made up of SPs drawn from 13 different Air Force bases. As a result, members of the squadron had to spend their first several days in Panama organizing themselves and undergoing the training the 101st task force had already completed at Fort Campbell. Still, the inter-service teamwork was excellent despite this delay in getting to joint training.

- There is no substitute for a disciplined, cohesive unit in an operation of this kind. The soldiers who went to Panama to move the Cuban migrants had been trained primarily for combat operations, but the discipline developed for war also served well in this peacetime operation. During the entire operation, there was not one serious disciplinary incident that adversely affected the mission, by soldiers either on or off duty.

- Infantrymen are trained to be aggressive and to respond with force to unclear or threatening situations; this is necessary for combat. But we must ensure that this aggressiveness is secondary to the discipline that requires soldiers to follow any orders, any time. We must train our soldiers to have the flexibility to apply the skills learned for use in war to the requirements of operations other than war.

- Pre-deployment training is critical. Rarely will peacetime operations require deployment in 48 hours. More often than not, there will be time for some mission-specific training, and because this training is critical, it must be done as effectively as possible. The 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry, did this in two ways: Bringing in soldiers from other units to serve as opposing force to make the most of training time for the deploying soldiers, and seeking out subject-matter experts to serve as instructors for relevant classes. In the case of this battalion, and in many other operations other than war, the best subject-matter experts available were the divisional MPs.

As a rapid deployment force, the battalion was trained and prepared for short-notice deployments. This meant that when the call came to move, the unit and its soldiers were free to concentrate on their pre-deployment training instead of spending this valuable time arranging family care plans and taking care of other personal business. In today's smaller army, no unit can count on having 30 days to prepare for deployment on a real-world mission.

- Direct coordination between units at the lowest possible level went a long way toward facilitating teamwork between the different units in the operation. By directly coordinating the migrant handover on the ground, the officers in charge of the Air Force SPs and the infantry companies with the airport mission developed a simple, workable plan and an agreement that was accepted by both sides. If this coordination had been done through several staff layers, it would have taken much longer and probably would not have worked as well.

No two operations other than war in the future will be exactly the same, but the lessons learned from the experience of the 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry, in Operation *Safe Passage* can be applied to any non-combat mission our forces may be called upon to perform.

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